

## Chapter 5

### *The Analects*

#### Confucius (Kǎnxi)

(c. 551 BCE-479 BCE)

#### *Confucianism: The Moral Way of the Past*

The Chinese refer to the period of Eastern Zhou as the Age of a Hundred Schools. Of the many schools of thought that flourished then, none has had a more substantial impact on Chinese culture than *Confucianism*, a philosophy ascribed to a teacher whom history identifies as *Confucius*.

Tradition records that this sage was born in 552 or 551 BCE into the aristocratic but impoverished Kong family, which traced its lineage to the Shang Dynasty. Young Kong Qiu, as he was named, became an authority on court rituals and statecraft and rose to high office in his native state of Lu in northeastern China. In 497 he resigned his position when proper rituals were not performed during a state sacrifice to Heaven. Already an established teacher, he embarked on a fourteen-year period of wandering with his students. Traveling to the courts of various small states, he attempted without success to convince their princes to employ his philosophy of life and government – his *Moral Way* – which he believed would return Chinese society to a state of harmony and justice. Finally in 484, at age sixty-seven, Master Kong was recalled to Lu but not offered an office. He spent his remaining years teaching and died at age seventy-two in 479 BCE, convinced that he had failed to halt what he believed to be the moral corruption and political chaos of his day.

If Confucius died thinking himself a failure, he was wrong. His students achieved high positions of responsibility and became teachers themselves of the Moral Way. Through their students and the generations of students that followed, Confucius' ideas were widely disseminated. In the Age of Tang (618-907 CE) Confucianism became virtually synonymous with Chinese culture and played an almost equally important role in shaping Korean and Japanese thought. Because of Master Kong's profound impact on Chinese civilization, posterity accorded him the elegant title *Kongfuzi* (Reverend Master Kong), which seventeenth-century Western scholars Latinized into *Confucius*.

Recently some historians have challenged this story. Several claim that the historical Confucius was not a scholar-official but a conservative warrior-noble who held very few of the values that tradition later ascribed to him. Several others even question the historicity of Confucius, concluding that the man was a fictional construct of a much later age. Notwithstanding these challenges, most historians accept the overall outlines of the traditional story, even though they generally agree that later generations ascribed to Confucius some ideas and emphases that were never his.

Although later disciples of *Confucian* thought, such as *Mengzi*, or *Mencius* (c. 370-300 BCE), carried the ideas of the master to points that he never imagined, it seems possible to identify the principles that served as bedrocks of Confucius' thinking. First, we must realize that Master Kong was a revolutionary conservative. He sought to transform Chinese society and government by returning it to the values and practices of the era of the duke of Zhou, a twelfth-century BCE legislator and consolidator of the early Zhou Dynasty who, Kong was convinced, presided over a Golden Age of harmony and prosperity. In order to achieve this end, Kong Qiu emphasized several virtues. Chief among them were *xiao*, *li*, and *ren*. *Xiao* is best translated as “filial piety” (devotion and service to parents, ancestors, and superiors). *Li* is best understood as both “proper behavior” and “performance of the rituals.” *Ren* is the richest of the terms and is variously translated as “human-heartedness,” “benevolence toward humanity,” nobility of heart,” and “humaneness.”

As noted, Confucius revered the ways of the past. Consequently, he urged his students to master ancient traditions and texts, such as the *Book of Documents* and the *Book of Songs*. . . But his philosophy went well beyond simple admiration and emulation. He took age-old Chinese values, such as filial piety and proper performance of ancient rituals, and turned them into moral principles. His genius was that he insisted human beings are moral creatures with social obligations and are, by that fact, obliged to comport themselves humanely and with integrity. He also taught that humans, or at least males, are capable of perfecting themselves as upright individuals. His ideal moral agent, so far as we can infer from the evidence, was the superior man (or gentleman), who cultivated virtue through study and imitation of the Moral Way of the past. This person, by knowing the good, would choose the good. What is more, he would act as an example to others, who would irresistibly follow the path he set along the Way of Goodness.

Although a traditionalist, Confucius was an innovator in that he was one of the first Chinese educators to offer instruction to any intelligent young man who sought the Moral Way, regardless of his social or economic status. Even so, Confucius' pupils were few. Tradition records that they numbered seventy-two, but we know the names of only about thirty-five.

As is true of so many great teachers whose words and example have placed a permanent stamp on a civilization, Confucius was not a productive writer. As far as we know, nothing he wrote or edited survives. Early Confucian disciples, however, managed to transmit to posterity a number of sayings ascribed to Master Kong and his immediate pupils. In time they were gathered into a book known as the *Lunyu* (*Ethical Dialogues*), which the modern West knows as the *Analects*, a term that means "literary Gleanings." We do not know which of these maxims Confucius actually uttered, but collectively they provide us with the best available view of Master Kong's teachings as remembered by those who knew and followed him.

To assist your study, we have grouped our selections by general topic but have retained the traditional numbering of the maxims. Ancient editors arranged these Confucian aphorisms into twenty chapters of unequal length. Thus 16.8 is saying 8 in Chapter 16. At the same time, be aware that there is a fair amount of thematic overlap. Several of the selections under the heading "The Well-Lived Life," for example, also deal with ren.

### *Questions for Analysis*

1. How and why does filial piety serve as a bedrock of Confucius' philosophical system?
2. Describe the superior man, or gentleman, as envisioned by Confucius. What are his qualities and how does he employ them?
3. What is Confucius' concept of good government and the ideal state?
4. Define what ren meant to Confucius. Was it absolute? Was it all-encompassing? In other words, did it have limitations? In what ways did it animate other virtues?
5. What role do the rituals play in the Confucian system?
6. "For Confucius, propriety, or proper performance of rituals, meant much more than good manners or proper etiquette. Like *ren* and filial piety, it was an interior quality that set the superior man apart from all other humans."  
Comment on this anonymous statement. Do you agree or disagree with this analysis of Confucius' philosophy? Be specific in your answer.
7. Compare the Confucian Way and the Confucian vision of the well-lived life with those of Laozi. What do you conclude from your analysis?

## *The Analects*

### *Filial Piety*

- 1.2 Master You<sup>1</sup> said: “Those who are filial to their parents and obedient to their elder brothers but are apt to defy their superiors are rare indeed; those who are not apt to defy their superiors, but are apt to stir up a rebellion simply do not exist. The gentleman applies himself to the roots. Only when the roots are well planted will the Way grow. Filial piety and brotherly obedience<sup>2</sup> are perhaps the roots of humanity,<sup>3</sup> are they not?”
- 1.9 Master Zeng<sup>4</sup> said: “Show genuine grief at a parent’s death,<sup>5</sup> keep offering sacrifices to them as time goes by, and the people’s moral character shall be reinforced.”
- 2.5 When Meng Yi-zi<sup>6</sup> asked about filial piety, the Master said: “Do not act contrary.”<sup>7</sup>  
When Fan Chi<sup>8</sup> was driving, the Master said to him: “When Meng-sun<sup>9</sup> asked me about filial piety, I replied: “Do not act contrary.”  
Fan Chi said: “What do you mean?”  
The Master said: “When your parents are alive, serve them in accordance with the rituals, when they die, bury them in accordance with the rituals; offer sacrifices to them in accordance with the rituals.”
- 4.18 The Master said: “In serving your parents, be gentle in remonstrance. Seeing that they are not inclined to comply, remain reverent, and do not disobey them. Though weary, do not feel resentful.”
- 13.18 The Duke of She<sup>10</sup> said to Master Kong: “In my native place, there is a man nicknamed Straight Body. When his father stole a sheep, he bore witness against him.  
Master Kong said: “In my native place, straight people are different from this man: Father conceals for son and son conceals for father. Straightness lies therein.”

### *The Gentleman*

- 1.7 Zi-Xia<sup>11</sup> said: “He who loves worthy men instead of beautiful women; who, in serving his parents, can exert all his energy; who, in serving the sovereign, can exhaust his talent; and who, in associating with friends, is truthful to his word – although others may say he has not learned, I will surely say he has learned.

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<sup>1</sup> You Ruo, one of Confucius’ chief disciples.

<sup>2</sup> The virtue of *ti*, whereby a younger brother obeys an older brother.

<sup>3</sup> *Ren*.

<sup>4</sup> Zeng Shen, one of Confucius’ most important pupils. Mengzi (Mencius), the greatest Confucian after Kongfuzi himself, studied in the school begun by Zeng Shen.

<sup>5</sup> Here he addresses a ruler.

<sup>6</sup> A minister of Lu.

<sup>7</sup> Contrary to the ancient rituals.

<sup>8</sup> Also known as Fan Xu, he was a major disciple of the Master.

<sup>9</sup> Meng Yi-zi, who came from the aristocratic family of Meng-sun.

<sup>10</sup> A minister of Shu, a state south of the Yangzi River.

<sup>11</sup> Also known as Bu Shang, a member of Confucius’ school. He figures prominently in the *Lunyu*, and became a major transmitter of the so-called *Confucian Classics*.

- 1 1.8 The Master said: "If a gentleman is not grave, he will not be awe-inspiring. If he learns, he will  
2 not be benighted.<sup>12</sup> He keeps whole-hearted sincerity and truthfulness as his major principles and  
3 does not befriend those beneath him. When he makes a mistake, he is not afraid to correct it.  
4
- 5 4.10 The Master said: "The gentleman, in his attitude toward all under Heaven,<sup>13</sup> neither favors  
6 anyone nor disfavours anyone. He keeps close to whoever is righteous.  
7
- 8 4.16 The Master said: "The gentleman is conversant with righteousness; the small man is conversant  
9 with profit."  
10
- 11 7.36 The Master said: "The gentleman is broad-minded; the small man is always narrow-minded."  
12
- 13 12.16 The Master said: "The gentleman helps others achieve their good ends; he does not help them  
14 achieve their evil ends. The small man does the opposite.  
15
- 16 15.18 The Master said: "A gentleman considers righteousness his major principle; he practices it in  
17 accordance with the rituals, utters it in modest terms, and fulfills it with truthfulness. A gentleman  
18 indeed!"  
19
- 20 15.34 The Master said: "The gentleman may not be recognized for small skills but can undertake great  
21 responsibilities; the small man cannot undertake great responsibilities but may be recognized in  
22 small skills.  
23
- 24 16.8 Master Kong said: "The gentleman has three fears: he fears the decree of Heaven; he fears great  
25 men;<sup>14</sup> he fears the sage men's words. The small man, not knowing the decree of Heaven, does  
26 not fear it; he scorns great men and mocks the sage men's words."  
27

## 28 *Good Government*

- 29
- 30 1.5 The Master said: "In governing a thousand-chariot state,<sup>15</sup> be reverent to your duties and truthful;  
31 economize expenditure and love men; employ the people at proper times."<sup>16</sup>  
32
- 33 2.1 The Master said: "He who conducts government with virtue may be likened to the North Star,  
34 which, seated in its place, is surrounded by multitudes of other stars.  
35
- 36 2.3 The Master said: "If you govern them with decrees and regulate them with punishments, the  
37 people will evade them but will have no sense of shame. If you govern them with virtue and  
38 regulate them with the rituals, they will have a sense of shame and flock to you."  
39
- 40 2.19 Duke Ai<sup>17</sup> asked: "What must we do to make the people obedient?"  
41 Master Kong replied: "Promote the upright, place them above the crooked, and the  
42 people shall be obedient. Promote the crooked, place them above the upright, and the people shall  
43 be disobedient."  
44
- 45 2.20 Ji Kang-zi<sup>18</sup> asked: "How do you make the people reverent, loyal, and mutually encouraging?"

<sup>12</sup> He will not be ignorant of the rituals.

<sup>13</sup> "All under Heaven" are all the Chinese.

<sup>14</sup> He is in awe of rulers.

<sup>15</sup> The military power of a state was computed by the number of chariots it could muster. A thousand-chariot state was fairly small.

<sup>16</sup> Employ their conscripted labor on public works during the slack times of the agricultural year.

<sup>17</sup> The prince of Lu (r. 494-466 BCE), whom several of Confucius' disciples served.

1           The Master said: “If you preside over them with dignity, they will be reverent; if you are  
2 filial and loving,<sup>19</sup> they will be loyal; if you promote the good and instruct the incapable, they will  
3 be mutually encouraging.”  
4

5 12.22 When Fan Chi asked about humanity, the Master said: “Loving men.”

6           When asked about wisdom, the Master said: “Knowing men.”

7           Fan Chi did not quite understand. The Master said: “Promote the upright, place them  
8 above the crooked, and you shall make the crooked upright.”

9           Fan Chi retired and, on meeting Zi-xia, said: “A moment ago, I went to see the Master  
10 and asked him about wisdom. The Master said: ‘Promote the upright, place them above the  
11 crooked, and you shall make the crooked upright.’ What does it mean?”

12           Zi-xia said: “How rich is the statement! When Shun was in possession of the empire, he  
13 selected from the multitude and promoted Gao Yao.<sup>20</sup> Thus, inhumane men left him. When Tang  
14 was in possession of the empire, he selected from the multitude and promoted Yi Yin.<sup>21</sup> Thus,  
15 inhumane men left him.”  
16

17 13.1 When Zi-lu<sup>22</sup> asked about government, the Master said: “Guide them, and make them toil.”

18           When asked to elaborate, the Master said: “Indefatigably.”  
19

20 *Ren*  
21

22 3.3 The Master said: “If a man is not humane, what can he do with the rituals? If a man is not  
23 humane, what can he do with music?”<sup>23</sup>  
24

25 4.1 The Master said: “To live among humane men is beautiful. Not to reside among humane men –  
26 how can one be considered wise?”  
27

28 4.3 The Master said: “Only a humane man is capable of loving men, and capable of loathing men.”  
29

30 4.4 The Master said: “If you bend your mind on humanity, you are free from evil.”  
31

32 4.5 The Master said: “Wealth and rank are what men desire: If you come by them undeservingly, you  
33 should not abide in them. Poverty and lowliness are what men loathe: If you come by the  
34 undeservingly, you should not abandon them. If a gentleman abandons humanity, how can he  
35 fulfill that name? A gentleman will not, for the space of a meal, depart from humanity. In haste  
36 and flurry, he always adheres to it; in fall and stumble, he always adheres to it.”  
37

38 13.19 When Fan Chi asked about humanity, the Master said: “Conduct yourself with respect; perform  
39 your duties with reverence; treat others with wholehearted sincerity. Even if you should journey  
40 to the Yis and Dis,<sup>24</sup> you cannot abandon these.”  
41

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<sup>18</sup> Prime minister to Duke Ai of Lu.

<sup>19</sup> Filial toward one’s parents and loving to one’s children.

<sup>20</sup> Yu Shun, last of the legendary Five Sage Emperors, chose the virtuous Gao Yao as his minister of justice.

<sup>21</sup> Tang, the founder of the Shang Dynasty and a figure highly revered by Master Kong.

<sup>22</sup> Also known as Zhong Iou, he was one of the Master’s best and most beloved students.

<sup>23</sup> The rituals were an elaborate, detailed code of proper etiquette governing all aspects of life, including sacrificial rites, state affairs, social relations, and day-to-day family matters. Specific rituals performed by an individual differed according to sex, age, social status, and context. Their purpose was to create harmony within a society where everyone knew his or her place and role and acted accordingly. Music, which represents the principle of harmony, accompanied court and family rituals. According to tradition, Confucius had a particular love of music and recommended that his followers become adept at it.

<sup>24</sup> Yi is an ancient Chinese term for the non-Chinese, or barbarian, tribes to the east, especially Korea; Di is a similar term for the tribes to the north. “The Yis and Dis” meant, therefore, all the barbarian tribes on the borders of China.

- 1 14.17 Zi-gong<sup>25</sup> said: “Guan Zhong was not a man of humanity, was he? When Duke Huan killed  
2 Prince Jiu, he not only was unable to die but became the duke’s prime minister, instead.<sup>26</sup>  
3 The Master said: “Guan Zhong helped Duke Huan become overlord of the various  
4 princes and set everything right in the empire. The people to this day benefit from his favors. But  
5 for Guan Zhong, we would be wearing our hair loose with our garments fastened on the left.<sup>27</sup>  
6 How could we expect him to be obstinately truthful like a common man or a common woman and  
7 hang himself in a gully with anyone knowing about it?  
8  
9 15.24 Zi-gong asked” “Is there one single word that one can practice throughout one’s life?”  
10 The Master said: “It is perhaps ‘like-hearted considerateness.’ ‘What you do not wish for  
11 yourself, do not impose on others.’”  
12  
13 17.23 Zi-gong said: “Does the gentleman also have people he loathes?”  
14 The Master said: “Yes, I do. I loathe those who babble about other people’s vices; I  
15 loathe those who, being in the lower stream, slander their superiors; I loathe those who are  
16 courageous but have no regard for the rituals; I loathe those who are resolute and daring but  
17 stubborn.”  
18 Then he said: “Ci,<sup>28</sup> are there also people you loathe?”  
19 “I loathe those who plagiarize and consider themselves wise; I loathe those who are  
20 impertinent and consider themselves courageous; I loathe those who divulge other people’s  
21 unseemly secrets and consider themselves straightforward.”  
22

### 23 *The Rituals*

- 24  
25 6.27 The Master said: “A gentleman who is extensively learned in culture and restrains himself with  
26 the rituals is not likely to betray.”<sup>29</sup>  
27  
28 12.1 When Yan Yuan<sup>30</sup> asked about humanity, the Master said: “‘To restrain oneself and return to the  
29 rituals constitutes humanity.’ One day one can restrain oneself and return to the rituals, all under  
30 Heaven will turn to humanity. The practice of humanity rests with oneself. Does it rest with  
31 anyone else?”  
32 Wan Yuan said: “May I ask the details?”  
33 The Master said: “That which does not conform to the rituals – do not look at it; that  
34 which does not conform to the rituals – do not listen to it; that which does not conform to the  
35 rituals – do not say it; that which does not conform to the rituals – do not do it.”

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<sup>25</sup> Also known as Duan-mu Ci, he was one of Master Kong’s most faithful followers and later became prime minister of Lu and a famous diplomat.

<sup>26</sup> Guan Zhong (?-645 BCE) was a brilliant statesman during the period described in the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, one of the *Five Confucian Classics*. Rather than committing suicide when Duke Huan seized control of the state of Qi by murdering Guan Zhong’s pupil, Prince Jiu, Guan Zhong became the Duke’s chief minister. As prime minister, he consolidated the state peacefully and protected its frontiers.

<sup>27</sup> Customs of non-Chinese tribes.

<sup>28</sup> Zi-Gong. See note 25.

<sup>29</sup> See note 23.

<sup>30</sup> Better known as Yan Hui (521?-481 BCE), he had the reputation of being the most humane of Master Kong’s students.